

# Circuit

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## Utilities gain by training exchanges

**M**ost utilities in the Northwest belong to the Northwest Utilities Training Alliance. BPA is an alliance member and also belongs to other groups to keep up with training needs for its workforce. One such effort is a partnership with Snohomish County Public Utilities District.

Bob Sweet, transmission line foreman at Snohomish, Wash., says these associations are important to BPA. They help BPA keep up with current training in all fields.

The joint BPA and Snohomish PUD worker exchange program holds training classes for apprentice line workers from both utilities. Line apprentices learn about the latest distribution and transmission equipment. Field folks swap experiences and share their expertise in handling jobs.

"These programs save considerable cost over contract training and outside specialty schools," Sweet says. "And BPA employees also get to know the crews and people in other utilities that we serve and often work beside."



BPA's Snohomish line crew trains with hot sticks for transmission line maintenance. Garry Oberst, Curt Martin and Tom Marr use the insulated fiberglass tools like robot arms to work around energized power lines.

Photo by Bob Sweet

Sweet says the partnership with Snohomish PUD has been a valuable aid for both groups. Sweet coordinates the worker exchange program that began in 1991. "BPA and Snohomish freely exchange instructors and students," he says.

In the eight years since the exchange began, BPA has trained 25 of the PUD's apprentices. And 15 BPA apprentices have been trained at one of the two PUD's training areas. "Several of the PUD workers trained with us two or three times during their apprenticeships," Sweet says.

The exchanges train BPA and Snohomish apprentices to build and maintain the different power systems. The PUD workers learn the comprehensive rigging to build transmission lines. BPA folks learn how to build distribution lines, both overhead and underground. BPA workers get hot stick and rubber glove training on lower voltage distribution lines. PUD workers get hot stick training on high voltage transmission lines.

Snohomish County PUD folks also have high regard for the exchange with BPA. John White, a PUD assistant general manager, wrote BPA regional manager Denis Sjoquist after BPA instructors taught a hot stick training program for more than 150 workers last summer and fall.

The two-week training program took place at the PUD's operations center in Everett. White thanked BPA for the loan of the two instructors, journeyman lineman Mike Deason and apprentice Tom Marr. "Mike did an excellent job of instructing the class, with the steady assistance of Tom," White said.

White thanked BPA for adding training days at the PUD's late request. He also recognized Sweet for his work to coordinate the exchange program with the PUD. White said, "We enjoy and appreciate the positive relationship that allows this exchange of instructors and students." ◀

*(Editor's note: See the page 6 profile on Mike Deason and his uncommon job.)*

**N**ews headlines called the New Year's rollover to year 2000 as "a yawner." While the media feted the millennium celebrations around the world, as far as Y2K disasters with computer shutdowns go, the new year came as a "non-event."

The yawner suited BPA and other utilities just fine. Much of the electric industry had worked five years to get ready for Y2K. BPA began checking its systems in 1995 to replace equipment that could go awry with a double zero date.

BPA led in efforts to prevent Y2K problems. So when the last Y2K countdown began two days before the end of 1999, BPA and the Northwest were confident.

Memories of Y2K are already fading fast. That's what happens when no major catastrophe or other event occurs. A year from now, no one will even talk about it. In a decade, few will remember anything about a Y2K threat associated with the new millennium.

But some BPA folks may remember Y2K well into the future. More than 200 extra employees stood by in the New Year's Eve watch. They were ready to help BPA handle any emergencies that may have occurred. Some were at headquarters and Ross to work with the news media.

## Y2K "yawner" fine with BPA

Press officer Ed Mosey said BPA facilities staff worked with communications to set up a media center in the headquarters public conference room. "It looked like a TV studio set, with large maps of the system mounted on a backdrop," Mosey said.

All three Portland TV network stations, the Associated Press and *The Oregonian* set up camp at BPA's media center. The TV stations parked their mobile vans near the front door of the building and ran cable into the center. Reporters filed stories live to their stations for periodic news broadcasts.

"They had nothing but good news to report," Mosey said.

Just before midnight, BPA opened a teleconference with the Dittmer Control Center.

Transmission's Sharon Blair described the scene from there as the clock ticked off the seconds. "With neither flash nor flicker, several years of preparation by hundreds of people at BPA were over," Mosey said. Cheers from the control center could be heard over the speaker phone as the clock struck 12.

Reporters took the rollover in stride. All thanked BPA for setting up the media center with the computer hookups and the phone lines for live data feeds. By 2 a.m., the press were gone and the media center became another BPA event of the past. ◀

**I**n the final weeks of 1999, national and local security concerns shifted away from Y2K system failures.

Instead, officials were more worried about possible acts of vandalism and sabotage. Milestone events such as the 1,000 year turnover often become target dates for unstable people to do things that will make the news or leave a mark in history.

In December, security officials had found a huge jump in computer viruses – all tied to the date rollover. Those could have caused havoc to businesses and individual computers. Across the country, police poised to deal with individual acts of destruction or violence.

BPA did have one act of destruction – the night before New Year's Eve. Vandals toppled a tower on

## Toppled tower is only incident



Photo by Gary Parks

the 2,000 kilovolt direct current Intertie that runs from The Dalles to Sylmar, Calif. The incident took place just before 9 p.m. on Dec. 30, about 37 miles southeast of Bend.

BPA dispatchers got an automatic signal about an outage. The line carried a small load at the time, and the power was rerouted on other lines. The Redmond line crew got the tower back up and the line in service the next day.

BPA's press spokesman Perry Gruber handled press relations the next day – New Year's Eve. He notified media of the vandalism and explained that service was routed around the downed tower. BPA has offered a \$10,000 reward for information that would lead to the arrest and conviction of the culprits. ◀



Administrator Judi Johansen listens as an employee comments at a "shirt sleeves" session in December. Johansen held the employee meetings at Portland and Vancouver to find out what folks thought would help make BPA a great place to work. (See the photo and a related article on page 2).

Photo by Jack Odgaard

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